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B: Proper 13 – Lectionary 18 – Pentecost 10

2 August 2015

John 6: 24-35

Salem, Bridgeport

"How to Perform a Miracle"

*What must we do to perform the works of God?" they asked.*

*Jesus answered, "Just one thing: trust. Trust in God and in what I am teaching you about God."*

*So they said, "Well if we're going to trust you, we're going to need a sign.*

*You know, like how Moses gave our ancestors bread in the desert." [paraphrase of John 6.28-31]*

Now if you weren't here last week or you can't remember what the gospel lesson was last week,  
you might not get the absurdity of this conversation, so let me refresh your memories.

Last week the gospel was the story of Jesus' feeding of the 5000.

Now those of us who have grown up in the church have heard that story so many times,  
we may miss the magnitude of the miracle.

With no preparation, Jesus fed 5000 people.

Now I just recently returned from our ELCA Lutheran triennial youth gathering.

There were approximately 24000 youth and 6000 adults there.

That meant we needed a stadium that could hold 30,000, a convention center that could hold 20,000,

about 60 hotels that could hold 500 each, and 220 buses to transport 10,000 people to work sites & hotels.

All told, we pumped \$30 million into Detroit's economy.

Now I know all the planning that goes into taking a group of 6-12 youth on a trip.

My husband knows what goes into taking 300 alumni on tour.

But 30,000! Hard to wrap one's mind around.

I imagine that our participation in such an event

must have been similar to what those 5000 people experienced that day with Jesus.

Small hamlets like Nazareth and Capernaum had no more than 400 people in them;

big cities like Bethsaida maybe had 2500.

So 5000 was the equivalent of the total population of 60 towns or 2 entire cities.

And they just showed up and needed lunch.

At \$10/person that would be \$50,000; at \$5, it would cost \$25,000; at \$1/person, we're still talking \$5,000.

All Jesus had were 5 barley loaves and 2 fish.

And Jesus fed them all.

It was an amazing miracle.

He not only fed them, but he fed them until they felt full –

which was in itself a miracle for most of the people there who today would be described as "food insecure".

And Jesus not only fed them until they were full, but there was so much left that each disciple left with a basket full.

<sup>14</sup>*When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say,*

*"This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world." [John 6]*

For a brief moment they are ready to forcibly make him king, so he vanishes,

(they're a bit puzzled because they know he didn't get on the boat with his disciples,

and it was the only boat there...)

but some boats come by and they get on board and finally catch up with him.

And what do they say? They want to know how to perform the "works of God" – like Jesus had done!  
They want to know his secret.

And he tells them. It's simple – all you have to do is believe. All you have to do is trust God 100%.  
All you have to do is listen to what I've been telling you all along.

It was simple. Too simple. And they don't believe. They can't believe. Not without proof.  
And so they demand a sign—something like Moses did—like the manna in the wilderness thing...

Do you see the absurdity here?

They are suggesting that Jesus give them these little flakey pastry-like crumbs to prove that they could trust him.  
Jesus had just fed 60 villages of people with 5 individual loaves of bread and 2 small fish!  
And they were demanding a flakey snack – as if the most amazing lunch ever had never happened.  
They were demanding a small sign handwritten on poster board  
when they had just witnessed a HUGE sign on the jumbo-tron!

But that's what happens with us human beings, it seems.

God is working miracles every day and we take most all of them for granted.  
Think of what one of those 5000 people would think if they could spend a single day with us!  
They would look at our huge mansions and our donkey-less carriages,  
they would see an unimaginable abundance of food on supermarket shelves and in our refrigerators,  
they would watch how one handle makes water pour out, and another flushes away human waste,  
they would hear us talk to a person on the other side of the world,  
and ask a tiny metal contraption a question and have it answer us!

Miracles are all around. We just don't always know them when we see them.

What Jesus came to tell us is that God loves us and wants every single person to have their hearts' desire,  
and God has the power to make that happen  
And all we have to do is believe that.

But the Biblical word for belief means more than intellectual agreement to a theory –  
it means trusting God with all one's heart and soul and mind and strength;  
it means relying on God instead of on oneself;  
it means listening to God and doing what God wants, no matter how illogical or impractical it may seem;  
it means treating everyone the way we would like to be treated, whether or not they deserve it.

What Jesus came to tell us is that we are each called by God as individuals,  
and we are also called by God as a community of faith.

Jesus fed 5000 people.

A few months ago, Bert came up with the idea that Salem should have a goal of feeding 5000 too –  
and that we should shout that goal aloud in the form of bumper stickers.

There were some people who thought he was a bit crazy.

I didn't think he was crazy, but I did say that maybe we should use the feeding of the 4000 as our goal.

Nothing happened for a month or two

and then Liz B was trying to figure out how to get her husband Joe out of the house  
and suggested maybe he could do a little more with our bookshelf-sized food pantry.

And then before anyone could say "food party"

Joe had a plan & a committee & a network of resources & funding & volunteers –  
and all we need now are the bumper stickers!

That's just one example of the miracles that God is working among us.

There are more happening – &even more are going to happen in the days and weeks ahead.

Like those people who wanted the manna of their ancestors

even they had experienced the miracle of 5000 being fed by Jesus with a mere 5 loaves and 2 fish,

I think that sometimes we expect miracles that look like familiar things from the past –

full pews and balanced budgets, for instance.

But Jesus didn't come to repeat past miracles but to perform new ones.

And he promised that his disciples would be able to perform even greater ones than he.

How do we perform greater miracles than Jesus? *"How do we perform the works of God?"*  
*"It's easy", says Jesus. "All you have to do is believe." Amen*